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ERSIDE LITERATURE SERIES

THREE OUTDOOR PAPERS

BY

T. W. HIGGINSON

WITH A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN & COMPANY
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The Riverside Literature Series

THREE OUTDOOR PAPERS

BY

THOMAS WENTWORTH HIGGINSON

WITH A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

AND AN INDEX OF PLANTS AND ANIMALS MENTIONED

HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN AND COMPANY
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

MR. STEPHEN HIGGINSON, JR., a Boston merchant, himself the son of another Boston merchant, who served in the Continental Congress, and descended from one of the earliest founders of the colony of Massachusetts Bay, was appointed, after he had passed middle life, to the stewardship of Harvard College. This office, now known as that of the bursar, required him to live in Cambridge, and represent the treasurer of the college in immediate connection with the student body. Accordingly he removed with his large family to Cambridge, and there was born, December 22, 1823, the youngest of his fifteen children, Thomas Wentworth Higginson.

In his delightful volume of personal reminiscences, *Cheerful Yesterdays*, Mr. Higginson has given a narrative of his youth and training in the college community, then a quiet, isolated country society; for Cambridge was separated from Boston by a wide river, and broad stretches of marshland on its banks increased the separation. A leisurely omni-

bus once an hour picked up the few passengers who wished or needed to go to town, but for the most part Cambridge was a contented village, having its rustic life blended with the cultivated, serene life of the academic circle; and the boys and girls who grew up together in the neighborhood found their pleasure half in books, half in that familiar intercourse with nature which is invited when the country beckons at the end of the village street.

The effect of this training is well seen in the character of Mr. Higginson's writing. The tastes formed in youth have been cultivated throughout his life, under all sorts of conditions, and the three papers which are gathered in this collection show that intimate acquaintance with the country on the edge of which he lived, and into which he made endless incursions, whether from Cambridge or Newburyport or Worcester or Newport. The index at the close gives the names of plants and animals mentioned. It would not be an idle exercise for one to make a similar index of authors casually referred to; and as one read over the names of Horace, Euripides, Homer, Virgil, among the ancients, Chaucer, Marvell, Sir Thomas Browne, Izaak Walton, among the early English worthies, Humboldt and Gray and Harris, among the

men of science, Scott, Emerson, Thoreau, Longfellow, Whittier, Wordsworth, Fredrika Bremer, Hawthorne, Goethe, Tennyson, Holmes, Susan Fenimore Cooper, among those fairly contemporary with the author himself, one might fancy for a moment that this was a bookish study of nature, but on looking closer would see how literature was the other lung with which this writer breathed, and that nature at first hand and nature as seen in poets and men of science so blended in his observation and reflection as to make but one image to the soul.

In his college life he was the youngest in his class but the second in rank, and he entered the active life of the world well equipped as to scholarship and with a mind quick to appropriate the new ideas which came hurrying into the ports of Boston and Cambridge on every breeze. It was the day when enthusiastic folk thought the world was to be swept fresh and clean with all the new brooms of reform ; and the staid, decorous community, which knew little of the extremes that marked society in other parts of the world, was set upon by the advance agents of communism, total abstinence, abolitionism, and religious individualism, and bidden throw away its idols and worship at the only true shrine. Mr.

Higginson had already made himself something more than an amateur naturalist; he now taught school a little, but presently found himself very easily in the Divinity School of his college, making ready to be a minister, and during the few years of his pulpit service, becoming more and more absorbed in the one commanding moral revolution which was for upheaving American society.

He has himself told how he took part in the agitation for abolition, and was for exchanging his pastoral crook for a musket when it almost looked as if the first battle between the two forces was to be fought in Boston streets; he had a share also in the colonizing movement which led to the actual preliminary fight in Kansas, and when the war for the Union finally did break out, he stepped down from the pulpit, laid aside his scholar's gown, and put on the habit of a soldier. From that day he ceased to be the Rev. Mr. Higginson, — a name well known by this time in anti-slavery circles, — and shortly became Colonel Higginson, a title which he has ever since retained. He led a regiment of blacks in South Carolina, and he has told the story of those historic days in his book, *Army Life in a Black Regiment.*

Meanwhile, lecturing had made him a

preacher between Sundays, and his love of literature and of nature had led him down some new lanes on his way to the goals toward which Reform pointed. He was impressed, as so many were, by the disabilities of women, and he wrote that effective paper, whose title was itself an argument, "Ought Women to learn the Alphabet?" He knew what nature did for the healthy man, and he wrote another paper, entitled "Saints and their Bodies," and these two papers headed a long succession of articles relating to education, the widening of the woman's world, and the better understanding of the beautiful world in which we live. A long residence at Newport in Rhode Island led to a series of delightful sketches to which he gave the name of *Oldport Days*, and to a romance entitled *Malbone*. He gathered his papers into volumes from time to time, and added also a volume of poems.

It is not surprising that one who had taken so strong an interest in American public life, and was so active in educational matters, should seek to break down the formal, uninteresting study of American history by writing a book which should show young people how alive history was, and his *Young Folks' History of the United States* was a pioneer

in the field of fresh, readable school-books. This animated survey of national growth has enjoyed great popularity from its first publication, and many who caught their first love of history from the book were grown men when they read his *Larger History of the United States of America to the Close of President Jackson's Administration.*

Colonel Higginson has taken an active part in public life. He has been a member of the Massachusetts State Board of Education, and a representative to the General Court of the same State, and no great discussion of national policy has failed to call out contributions from him either on the platform or through the press. About twenty years ago he returned to the city of his birth, and has since made his home there. One of the latest of his books, *Old Cambridge*, is a graceful sketch of the literary associations of that university town. His remembrances gave special force to his characterizations, but had any one else written the book, Colonel Higginson himself would have been a prominent figure in the group described.

H. E. S.

I

THE PROCESSION OF THE FLOWERS

I

THE PROCESSION OF THE FLOWERS

IN Cuba there is a blossoming shrub whose multitudinous crimson flowers are so seductive to the humming-birds that they hover all day around it, buried in its blossoms until petal and wing seem one. At first upright, the gorgeous bells droop downward, and fall unwithered to the ground, and are thence called by the Creoles "Cupid's Tears." Fredrika Bremer relates that daily she brought home handfuls of these blossoms to her chamber, and nightly they all disappeared. One morning she looked toward the wall of the apartment, and there, in a long crimson line, the delicate flowers went ascending one by one to the ceiling, and passed from sight. She found that each was borne laboriously onward by a little colorless ant much smaller than itself: the bearer was invisible, but the lovely burdens festooned the wall with beauty.

The Procession of the Flowers

To a watcher from the sky, the march of the flowers of any zone across the year would seem as beautiful as that West-Indian pageant. These frail creatures, rooted where they stand, a part of the "still life" of Nature, yet share her ceaseless motion. In the most sultry silence of summer noons, the vital current is coursing with desperate speed through the innumerable veins of every leaflet, and the apparent stillness, like the sleeping of a child's top, is in truth the very ecstasy of perfected motion.

Not in the tropics only, but even in England, whence most of our floral associations and traditions come, the march of the flowers is in an endless circle, and, unlike our experience, something is always in bloom. In the Northern United States, it is said, the active growth of most plants is condensed into ten weeks, while in the mother country the full activity is maintained through sixteen. But even the English winter does not seem to be a winter, in the same sense as ours, appearing more like a chilly and comfortless autumn. There is no month in the English year when some special plant does not bloom: the Colt's-foot there opens its fragrant flowers from December to February;

the yellow-flowered Hellebore, and its cousin, the sacred Christmas Rose of Glastonbury, extend from January to March; and the Snowdrop and Primrose often come before the first of February. Something may be gained, much lost, by that perennial succession; those links, however slight, must make the floral period continuous to the imagination; while our year gives a pause and an interval to its children, and after exhausted October has effloresced into Witch-Hazel, there is an absolute reserve of blossom until the Alders wave again.

No symbol could so well represent Nature's first yielding in spring-time as this blossoming of the Alder, the drooping of the tresses of these tender things. Before the frost is gone, and while the new-born season is yet too weak to assert itself by actually uplifting anything, it can at least let fall these blossoms, one by one, till they wave defiance to the winter on a thousand boughs. How patiently they have waited! Men are perplexed with anxieties about their own immortality; but these catkins, which hang, almost full-formed, above the ice all winter, show no such solicitude, though when March wooes them they are ready. Once relaxing, their

pollen is so prompt to fall that it sprinkles your hand as you gather them; then, for one day, they are the perfection of grace upon your table, and next day they are weary and emaciated, and their little contribution to the spring is done.

Then many eyes watch for the opening of the May-flower, day by day, and a few for the Hepatica. So marked and fantastic are the local preferences of all our plants, that, with miles of woods and meadows open to their choice, each selects only some few spots for its accustomed abodes, and some one among them all for its very earliest blossoming. There is often a single chosen nook, which you might almost cover with your handkerchief, where each flower seems to bloom earliest without variation, year by year. I know one such place for Hepatica a mile northeast, — another for May-flower two miles southwest; and each year the whimsical creature is in bloom on that little spot when not another flower can be found open through the whole country round. Accidental as the choice may appear, it is undoubtedly based on laws more eternal than the stars; yet why all subtle influences conspire to bless that undistinguishable knoll no

man can say. Another and similar puzzle offers itself in the distribution of the tints of flowers, — in these two species among the rest. There are certain localities, near by, where the Hepatica is all but white, and others where the May-flower is sumptuous in pink; yet it is not traceable to wet or dry, sun or shadow, and no agricultural chemistry can disclose the secret. Is it by some Darwinian law of selection that the white Hepatica has utterly overpowered the blue, in our Cascade Woods, for instance, while yet in the very midst of this pale plantation a single clump will sometimes bloom with all heaven on its petals? Why can one recognize the Plymouth May-flower, as soon as seen, by its wondrous depth of color? Perhaps it blushes with triumph to see how Nature has outwitted the Pilgrims, and has even succeeded in preserving her deer like an English duke, since she still maintains the deepest woods in Massachusetts precisely where those sturdy immigrants first began their clearings.

The Hepatica (called also Liverwort, Squirrel-Cup, or Blue Anemone) has been found in Worcester as early as March seventeenth, and in Danvers on March twelfth, — dates which appear almost the extreme of credibil-

ity. Our next wild-flower in this region is the Claytonia, or Spring-Beauty, which is common in the Middle States, but here found in only a few localities. It is the Indian *Miskodeed*, and was said to have been left behind when mighty Peboan, the Winter, was melted by the breath of Spring. It is an exquisitely delicate little creature, bears its blossoms in clusters, unlike most of the early species, and opens in gradual succession each white and pink-veined bell. It grows in moist places on the sunny edges of woods, and prolongs its shy career from about the tenth of April until almost the end of May.

A week farther into April, and the Bloodroot opens, — a name of guilt, and a type of innocence. This fresh and lovely thing appears to concentrate all its stains within its ensanguined root, that it may condense all purity in the peculiar whiteness of its petals. It emerges from the ground with each shy blossom wrapped in its own pale-green leaf, then doffs the cloak and spreads its long petals round a group of yellow stamens. The flower falls apart so easily, that when in full bloom it will hardly bear transportation, but with a touch the stem stands naked, a bare, gold-tipped sceptre amid drifts of snow. And

the contradiction of its hues seems carried into its habits. One of the most shy of wild plants, easily banished from its locality by any invasion, it yet takes to the garden with unpardonable readiness, doubles its size, blossoms earlier, repudiates its love of water, and flaunts its great leaves in the unnatural confinement, until it elbows out the exotics. Its charm is gone, unless one find it in its native haunts, beside some cascade which streams over rocks that are dark with moisture, green with moss, and snowy with white bubbles. Each spray of dripping feather-moss exudes a tiny torrent of its own, or braided with some tiny neighbor, above the little water-fonts which sleep sunless in ever-verdant caves. Sometimes along these emerald canals there comes a sudden rush and hurry, as if some anxious housekeeper upon the hill above were afraid that things were not stirring fast enough, — and then again the waving and sinuous lines of water are quieted to a serener flow. The delicious red thrush and the busy little yellow-throat are not yet come to this their summer haunt; but all day long the answering field-sparrows trill out their sweet, shy, accelerating lay.

In the same localities with the Bloodroot,

though some days later, grows the Dog-Tooth Violet, — a name hopelessly inappropriate, but likely never to be changed. These hardy and prolific creatures have also many localities of their own; for, though they do not acquiesce in cultivation, like the sycophantic Bloodroot, yet they are hard to banish from their native haunts, but linger after the woods are cleared and the meadow drained. The bright flowers blaze back all the yellow light of noonday, as the gay petals curl and spread themselves above their beds of mottled leaves; but it is always a disappointment to gather them, for indoors they miss the full ardor of the sunbeams, and are apt to go to sleep and nod expressionless from the stalk.

And almost on the same day with this bright apparition one may greet a multitude of concurrent visitors, arriving so accurately together that it is almost a matter of accident which of the party shall first report himself. Perhaps the Dandelion should have the earliest place; indeed, I once found it in Brookline on the seventh of April. But it cannot ordinarily be expected before the twentieth, in Eastern Massachusetts, and rather later in the interior; while by the same date I have also found near Boston the Cowslip, or

Marsh-Marigold, the Spring-Saxifrage, the Anemones, the Violets, the Bellwort, the Houstonia, the Cinquefoil, and the Strawberry-blossom. Varying, of course, in different spots and years, the arrival of this coterie is yet nearly simultaneous, and they may all be expected hereabouts before May-day at the very latest. After all, in spite of the croakers, this festival could not have been much better timed; for the delicate blossoms which mark the period are usually in perfection on this day, and it is not long before they are past their prime.

Some early plants which have now almost disappeared from Eastern Massachusetts are still found near Worcester in the greatest abundance, — as the larger Yellow Violet, the Red Trillium, the dwarf Ginseng, the Clintonia or Wild Lily-of-the-Valley, and the pretty fringed Polygala, which Miss Cooper christened "Gay-Wings." Others, again, are now rare near Worcester, and growing rarer, though still abundant a hundred miles farther inland. In several bits of old, swampy wood one may still find, usually close together, the Hobble-Bush and the Painted Trillium, the Mitella, or Bishop's-Cap, and the snowy Tiarella. Others still have entirely vanished

within ten years, and that in some cases without any adequate explanation. The dainty white Corydalis, profanely called "Dutchman's Breeches," and the quaint, woolly Ledum, or Labrador Tea, have disappeared within that time. The beautiful Linnæa is still found annually, but flowers no more; as is also the case, in all but one distant locality, with the once abundant Rhododendron. Nothing in Nature has for me a more fascinating interest than these secret movements of vegetation, — the sweet, blind instinct with which flowers cling to old domains until absolutely compelled to forsake them. How touching is the fact, now well known, that salt-water plants still flower beside the Great Lakes, yet dreaming of the time when those waters were briny as the sea! Nothing in the demonstrations of Geology seems grander than the light lately thrown by Professor Gray, from the analogies between the flora of Japan and of North America, upon the successive epochs of heat which led the wandering flowers along the Arctic lands, and of cold which isolated them once more. Yet doubtless these humble movements of our local plants may be laying up results as important, and may hereafter supply evi-

dence of earth's changes upon some smaller scale.

May expands to its prime of beauty; the summer birds come with the fruit-blossoms, the gardens are deluged with bloom, and the air with melody, while in the woods the timid spring flowers fold themselves away in silence and give place to a brighter splendor. On the margin of some quiet swamp a myriad of bare twigs seem suddenly overspread with purple butterflies, and we know that the Rhodora is in bloom. Wordsworth never immortalized a flower more surely than Emerson this, and it needs no weaker words; there is nothing else in which the change from nakedness to beauty is so sudden, and when you bring home the great mass of blossoms they appear all ready to flutter away again from your hands and leave you disenchanted.

At the same time the beautiful Cornel-tree is in perfection; startling as a tree of the tropics, it flaunts its great flowers high up among the forest-branches, intermingling its long, slender twigs with theirs, and garnishing them with alien blooms. It is very available for household decoration, with its four great, creamy petals, — flowers they are not, but floral involucres, — each with a fantastic curl

and stain at its tip, as if the fire-flies had alighted on them and scorched them; and yet I like it best as it peers out in barbaric splendor from the delicate green of young Maples. And beneath it grows often its more abundant kinsman, the Dwarf Cornel, with the same four great petals enveloping its floral cluster, but lingering low upon the ground, — an herb whose blossoms mimic the statelier tree.

The same rich, creamy hue and texture show themselves in the Wild Calla, which grows at this season in dark, sequestered watercourses, and sometimes well rivals, in all but size, that superb whiteness out of a land of darkness, the Ethiopic Calla of the conservatory. At this season, too, we seek another semi-aquatic rarity, whose homely name cannot deprive it of a certain garden-like elegance, the Buckbean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*). This is one of the shy plants which yet grow in profusion within their own domain. I have found it of old in Cambridge, and then upon the pleasant shallows of the Artichoke, that loveliest tributary of the Merrimack, and I have never seen it where it occupied a patch more than a few yards square, while yet within that space the multitudinous

spikes grow always tall and close, reminding one of Hyacinths, when in perfection, but more delicate and beautiful. The only locality I know for it in this vicinity lies seven miles away, where a little inlet from the lower, winding bays of Lake Quinsigamond goes stealing up among a farmer's hay-fields, and there, close beside the public road and in full view of the farm-house, this rare creature fills the water. But to reach it we commonly row down the lake to a sheltered lagoon, separated from the main lake by a long island, which is gradually forming itself like the coral isles, growing each year denser with alder thickets where the king-birds build; — there we leave the boat among the lily-leaves, and take a lane which winds among the meadows and gives a fitting avenue for the pretty thing we seek. It is not safe to vary many days from the twentieth of May, for the plant is not long in perfection, and is past its prime when the lower blossoms begin to wither on the stem.

But should we miss this delicate adjustment of time, it is easy to console ourselves with bright armfuls of Lupine, which bounteously flowers for six weeks along our lakeside, ranging from the twenty-third of May to the sixth of July. The Lupine is one of our most

travelled plants; for, though never seen off the American continent, it stretches to the Pacific, and is found upon the Arctic coast. On these banks of Lake Quinsigamond it grows in great families, and should be gathered in masses and placed in a vase by itself; for it needs no relief from other flowers, its own soft leaves afford background enough, and though the white variety rarely occurs, yet the varying tints of blue upon the same stalk are a perpetual gratification to the eye. I know not why shaded blues should be so beautiful in flowers, and yet avoided as distasteful in ladies' fancy-work; but it is a mystery like that which long repudiated blue and green from all well-regulated costumes, while Nature yet evidently prefers it to any other combination in her wardrobe.

Another constant ornament of the end of May is the large pink Lady's-Slipper, or Moccason-Flower, the "Cypripedium not due till to-morrow," which Emerson attributes to the note-book of Thoreau, — to-morrow, in these parts, meaning about the twentieth of May. It belongs to the family of Orchids, a high-bred race, fastidious in habits, sensitive as to abodes. Of the ten species named as rarest among American endogenous plants by

Dr. Gray, in his valuable essay on the statistics of our northern flora, all but one are Orchids. Even an abundant species, like the present, retains the family traits in its person, and never loses its high-born air and its delicate veining. I know a grove where it can be gathered by the hundred within a half-acre, and yet I never can divest myself of the feeling that each specimen is a choice novelty. But the actual rarity occurs, at least in this region, when one finds the smaller and more beautiful Yellow Moccason-Flower, — *Cypripedium parviflorum*, — which accepts only our very choicest botanical locality, the "Rattlesnake Ledge" on Tatessit Hill, and may, for aught I know, have been the very plant which Elsie Venner laid upon her schoolmistress's desk.

June is an intermediate month between the spring and summer flowers. Of the more delicate early blossoms, the Dwarf Cornel, the Solomon's-Seal, and the Yellow Violet still linger in the woods, but rapidly make way for larger masses and more conspicuous hues. The meadows are gorgeous with Clover, Buttercups, and Wild Geranium; but Nature is a little chary for a week or two, maturing a more abundant show. Meanwhile one may

afford to take some pains to search for another rarity, almost disappearing from this region, — the lovely Pink Azalea. It still grows plentifully in a few sequestered places, selecting woody swamps to hide itself; and certainly no shrub suggests, when found, more tropical associations. Those great, nodding, airy, fragrant clusters, tossing far above one's head their slender cups of honey, seem scarcely to belong to our sober zone, any more than the scarlet tanager which sometimes builds its nest beside them. They appear bright exotics, which have wandered into our woods, and are too happy to feel any wish for exit. And just as they fade, their humble sister in white begins to bloom, and carries on through the summer the same intoxicating fragrance.

But when June is at its height, the sculptured chalices of the Mountain Laurel begin to unfold, and thenceforward, for more than a month, extends the reign of this our woodland queen. I know not why one should sigh after the blossoming gorges of the Himalaya, when our forests are all so crowded with this glowing magnificence, — rounding the tangled swamps into smoothness, lighting up the underwoods, overtopping the pastures,

lining the rural lanes, and rearing its great, pinkish masses till they meet overhead. The color ranges from the purest white to a perfect rose-pink, and there is an inexhaustible vegetable vigor about the whole thing which puts to shame those tenderer shrubs that shrink before the progress of cultivation. There is the Rhododendron, for instance, a plant of the same natural family with the Laurel and the Azalea, and looking more robust and woody than either; it once grew in many localities in this region, and still lingers in a few, without consenting either to die or to blossom. There is only one remote place from which any one now brings into our streets those large, luxuriant flowers, waving white above the dark green leaves, and bearing "just a dream of sunset on their edges, and just a breath from the green sea in their hearts." The Laurel, on the other hand, maintains its ground, imperturbable and almost impassable, on every hillside, takes no hints, suspects no danger, and nothing but the most unmistakable onset from spade or axe can diminish its profusion. Gathering it on the most lavish scale seems only to serve as wholesale pruning; nor can I conceive that the Indians, who once ruled over this

whole country from Wigwam Hill, could ever have found it more inconveniently abundant than now. We have perhaps no single spot where it grows in such perfect picturesqueness as at "The Laurels," on the Merrimack, just above Newburyport, — a whole hillside scooped out and the hollow piled solidly with flowers, and pines curving around it above, and the river encircling it below, on which your boat glides along, while you look up through glimmering arcades of bloom. But for the last half of June it monopolizes everything in the Worcester woods, — no one picks anything else; and it fades so slowly that I have found a perfect blossom on the last day of July.

At the same time with this royalty of the woods, the queen of the water ascends her throne, for a reign as undisputed and far more prolonged. The extremes of the Water-Lily in this vicinity, so far as I have known, are the eighteenth of June and the thirteenth of October, — a longer range than belongs to any other conspicuous wild-flower, unless we except the Dandelion and Houstonia. It is not only the most fascinating of all flowers to gather, but more available for decorative purposes than almost any other,

if it can only be kept fresh. The best method for this purpose, I believe, is to cut the stalk very short before placing in the vase; then, at night, the lily will close and the stalk curl upward; refresh them by changing the water, and in the morning the stalk will be straight and the flower open.

From this time forth Summer has it all her own way. After the first of July the yellow flowers begin, matching the yellow fire-flies: Hawkweeds, Loosestrifes, Primroses bloom, and the bushy Wild Indigo. The variety of hues increases; delicate purple Orchises bloom in their chosen haunts, and Wild Roses blush over hill and dale. On peat-meadows the Adder's-Tongue Arethusa (now called Pogonia) flowers profusely, with a faint, delicious perfume, — and its more elegant cousin, the Calopogon, by its side. In this vicinity we miss the blue Harebell, the identical harebell of Ellen Douglas, which I remember as waving its exquisite flowers along the banks of the Merrimack, and again at Brattleborough, below the cascade in the village, where it has climbed the precipitous sides of old buildings, and nods inaccessibly from their crevices, in that picturesque spot, looking down on the hurrying river. But,

with this exception, there is nothing wanting here of the familiar flowers of early summer.

The more closely one studies Nature, the finer her adaptations grow. For instance, the change of seasons is analogous to a change of zones, and summer assimilates our vegetation to that of the tropics. In those lands, Humboldt has remarked, one misses the beauty of wild-flowers in the grass, because the luxuriance of vegetation develops everything into shrubs. The form and color are beautiful, "but, being too high above the soil, they disturb that harmonious proportion which characterizes the plants of our European meadows. Nature has, in every zone, stamped on the landscape the peculiar type of beauty proper to the locality." But every midsummer reveals the same tendency. In early spring, when all is bare, and small objects are easily made prominent, the wild-flowers are generally delicate. Later, when all verdure is profusely expanded, these miniature strokes would be lost, and Nature then practises landscape gardening in large, lights up the copses with great masses of White Alder, makes the roadsides gay with Aster and Golden-Rod, and tops the tall, coarse Meadow-Grass with nodding Lilies and tufted

Spiræa. One instinctively follows these plain hints, and gathers bouquets sparingly in spring and exuberantly in summer.

The use of wild-flowers for decorative purposes merits a word in passing, for it is unquestionably in favored hands a branch of high art. It is true that we are bidden, on good authority, to love the wood-rose and leave it on its stalk; but against this may be set the saying of Bettine Brentano, that "all flowers which are broken become immortal in the sacrifice;" and certainly the secret harmonies of these fair creatures are so marked and delicate that we do not understand them till we try to group floral decorations for ourselves. The most successful artists will not, for instance, consent to put those together which do not grow together; for Nature understands her business, and distributes her masses and backgrounds unerringly. Yonder soft and feathery Meadow-Sweet longs to be combined with Wild Roses: it yearns towards them in the field, and, after withering in the hand most readily, it revives in water as if to be with them in the vase. In the same way the White Spiræa serves as natural background for the Field Lilies. These lilies, by the way, are the brightest adornment of our meadows

during the short period of their perfection. We have two species, — one slender, erect, solitary, scarlet, looking up to heaven with all its blushes on; the other clustered, drooping, pale-yellow. I never saw the former in such profusion as on the bare summit of Wachusett. The granite ribs have there a thin covering of crisp moss, spangled with the white, starry blossoms of the Mountain Cinquefoil; and as I lay and watched the red lilies that waved their innumerable urns around me, it needed but little imagination to see a thousand altars, sending visible flames forever upward to the answering sun.

August comes: the Thistles are in bloom, beloved of butterflies; deeper and deeper tints, more passionate intensities of color, prepare the way for the year's decline. A wealth of gorgeous Golden-Rod waves over all the hills, and enriches every bouquet one gathers; its bright colors command the eye, and it is graceful as an elm. Fitly arranged, it gives a bright relief to the superb beauty of the Cardinal-Flowers, the brilliant blue-purple of the Vervain, the pearl-white of the Life-Everlasting, the delicate lilac of the Monkey-Flower, the soft pink and white of the Spiræas, — for the white yet lingers, — all sur-

rounded by trailing wreaths of blossoming Clematis.

But the Cardinal-Flower is best seen by itself, and, indeed, needs the surroundings of its native haunts to display its fullest beauty. Its favorite abode is along the dank, mossy stones of some black and winding brook, shaded with overarching bushes, and running one long stream of scarlet with these superb occupants. It seems amazing how anything so brilliant can mature in such a darkness. When a ray of sunlight strays in upon it, the bright creature seems to hover on the stalk ready to take flight, like some lost tropic bird. There is a spot whence I have in ten minutes brought away as many as I could hold in both arms, some bearing fifty blossoms on a single stalk; and I could not believe that there was such another mass of color in the world. Nothing cultivated is comparable to them; and, with all the talent lately lavished on wild-flower painting, I have never seen the peculiar sheen of these petals in the least degree delineated. It seems some new and separate tint, equally distinct from scarlet and from crimson, a splendor for which there is as yet no name, but only the reality.

It is the signal of autumn, when September

exhibits the first Barrel-Gentian by the roadside; and there is a pretty insect in the meadows — the Mourning-Cloak Moth it might be called — which gives coincident warning. The innumerable Asters mark this period with their varied and wide-spread beauty; the meadows are full of rose-colored Polygala, of the white spiral spikes of the Ladies'-Tresses, and of the fringed loveliness of the Gentian. This flower, always unique and beautiful, opening its delicate eyelashes every morning to the sunlight, closing them again each night, has also a thoughtful charm about it as the last of the year's especial darlings. It lingers long, each remaining blossom growing larger and more deep in color, as with many other flowers; and after it there is nothing for which to look forward, save the fantastic Witch-Hazel.

On the water, meanwhile, the last White Lilies are sinking beneath the surface, and the last gay Pickerel-Weed is gone, though the rootless plants of the delicate Bladder-Wort, spreading over acres of shallows, still impurple the wide, smooth surface. Harriet Prescott Spofford says that some souls are like the Water-Lilies, fixed, yet floating. But others are like this graceful purple blos-

som, floating unfixed, kept in place only by its fellows around it, until perhaps a breeze comes, and, breaking the accidental cohesion, sweeps them all away.

The season reluctantly yields its reign, and over the quiet autumnal landscape everywhere, even after the glory of the trees is past, there are tints and fascinations of minor beauty. Last October, for instance, in walking, I found myself on a little knoll, looking northward. Overhead was a bower of climbing Waxwork, with its yellowish pods scarce disclosing their scarlet berries,—a wild Grapevine, with its fruit withered by the frost into still purple raisins, — and yellow Beech-leaves, detaching themselves with an effort audible to the ear. In the foreground were blue Raspberry-stems, yet bearing greenish leaves, — pale-yellow Witch-Hazel, almost leafless, — purple Viburnum-berries, — the silky cocoons of the Milkweed, — and, amid the underbrush, a few lingering Asters and Golden-Rods, Ferns still green, and Maidenhair bleached white. In the background were hazy hills, white Birches bare and snow-like, and a Maple half-way up a sheltered hillside, one mass of canary-color, its fallen leaves making an apparent reflection on the

earth at its foot, — and then a real reflection, fused into a glassy light intenser than itself, upon the smooth, dark stream below. The beautiful disrobing suggested the persistent and unconquerable delicacy of Nature, who shrinks from nakedness and is always seeking to veil her graceful boughs, — if not with leaves, then with feathery hoar-frost, ermined snow, or transparent icy armor.

After all, the fascination of summer lies not in any details, however perfect, but in the sense of total wealth that summer gives. Wholly to enjoy this, one must give one's self passively to it, and not expect to reproduce it in words. We strive to picture heaven, when we are barely at the threshold of the inconceivable beauty of earth. Perhaps the truant boy who simply bathes himself in the lake and then basks in the sunshine, dimly conscious of the exquisite loveliness around him, is wiser, because humbler, than is he who with presumptuous phrases tries to utter it. There are moments when the atmosphere is so surcharged with luxury that every pore of the body becomes an ample gate for sensation to flow in, and one has simply to sit still and be filled. In after years the memory of books seems barren or

vanishing, compared with the immortal bequest of hours like these. Other sources of illumination seem cisterns only; these are fountains. They may not increase the mere quantity of available thought, but they impart to it a quality which is priceless. No man can measure what a single hour with Nature may have contributed to the moulding of his mind. The influence is self-renewing, and if for a long time it baffles expression by reason of its fineness, so much the better in the end.

The soul is like a musical instrument: it is not enough that it be framed for the most delicate vibration, but it must vibrate long and often before the fibres grow mellow to the finest waves of sympathy. I perceive that in the veery's carolling, the clover's scent, the glistening of the water, the waving wings of butterflies, the sunset tints, the floating clouds, there are attainable infinitely more subtile modulations of thought than I can yet reach the sensibility to discriminate, much less describe. If in the simple process of writing one could physically impart to this page the fragrance of this spray of Azalea beside me, what a wonder would it seem! — and yet one ought to be able, by the mere

use of language, to supply to every reader the total of that white, honeyed, trailing sweetness, which summer insects haunt and the Spirit of the Universe loves. The defect is not in language, but in men. There is no conceivable beauty of blossom so beautiful as words, — none so graceful, none so perfumed. It is possible to dream of combinations of syllables so delicious that all the dawning and decay of summer cannot rival their perfection, nor winter's stainless white and azure match their purity and their charm. To write them, were it possible, would be to take rank with Nature; nor is there any other method, even by music, for human art to reach so high.

II

APRIL DAYS

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Can trouble dwell with April days?
In Memoriam.

IN our methodical American life, we still recognize some magic in summer. Most persons at least resign themselves to being decently happy in June. They accept June. They compliment its weather. They complain of the earlier months as cold, and so spend them in the city; and they complain of the later months as hot, and so refrigerate themselves on some barren sea-coast. God offers us yearly a necklace of twelve pearls; most men choose the fairest, label it June, and cast the rest away. It is time to chant a hymn of more liberal gratitude.

There are no days in the whole round year more delicious than those which often come to us in the latter half of April. On these days one goes forth in the morning, and finds an Italian warmth brooding over all the hills,

taking visible shape in a glistening mist of silvered azure, with which mingles the smoke from many bonfires. The sun trembles in his own soft rays, till one understands the old English tradition, that he dances on Easter-Day. Swimming in a sea of glory, the tops of the hills look nearer than their bases, and their glistening watercourses seem close to the eye, as is their liberated murmur to the ear. All across this broad intervale the teams are ploughing. The grass in the meadow seems all to have grown green since yesterday. The blackbirds jangle in the oak, the robin is perched upon the elm, the song-sparrow on the hazel, and the bluebird on the apple-tree. There rises a hawk and sails slowly, the stateliest of airy things, a floating dream of long and languid summer-hours. But as yet, though there is warmth enough for a sense of luxury, there is coolness enough for exertion. No tropics can offer such a burst of joy; indeed, no zone much warmer than our Northern States can offer a genuine spring. There can be none where there is no winter, and the monotone of the seasons is broken only by wearisome rains. Vegetation and birds being distributed over the year, there is no burst of verdure nor of

song. But with us, as the buds are swelling, the birds are arriving; they are building their nests almost simultaneously; and in all the Southern year there is no such rapture of beauty and of melody as here marks every morning from the last of April onward.

But days even earlier than these, in April, have a charm, — even days that seem raw and rainy, when the sky is dull and a bequest of March-wind lingers, chasing the squirrel from the tree and the children from the meadows. There is a fascination in walking through these bare early woods, — there is such a pause of preparation, winter's work is so cleanly and thoroughly done. Everything is taken down and put away; throughout the leafy arcades the branches show no remnant of last year, save a few twisted leaves of oak and beech, a few empty seed-vessels of the tardy witch-hazel, and a few gnawed nutshells dropped coquettishly by the squirrels into the crevices of the bark. All else is bare, but prophetic: buds everywhere, the whole splendor of the coming summer concentrated in those hard little knobs on every bough; and clinging here and there among them a brown, papery chrysalis, from which shall yet wave the superb wings of the Luna moth.

An occasional shower patters on the dry leaves, but it does not silence the robin on the outskirts of the wood: indeed, he sings louder than ever during rain, though the song-sparrow and the bluebird are silent.

Then comes the sweetness of the nights in latter April. There is as yet no evening-primrose to open suddenly, no cistus to drop its petals; but the May-flower knows the moment, and becomes more fragrant in the darkness, so that one can then often find it in the woods without aid from the eye. The pleasant night-sounds are begun; the hylas are uttering their shrill *peep* from the meadows, mingled soon with hoarser toads, who take to the water at this season to deposit their spawn. The tree-toads soon join them; but one listens in vain for bull-frogs, or katydids, or grasshoppers, or whippoorwills, or crickets: we must wait for most of these until the nights of June.

The earliest familiar token of the coming season is the expansion of the stiff catkins of the alder into soft, drooping tresses. These are so sensitive, that, if you pluck them at almost any time during the winter, a few days' sunshine will make them open in a vase of water, and thus they eagerly yield to

every moment of April warmth. The blossom of the birch is more delicate, that of the willow more showy, but the alders come first. They cluster and dance everywhere upon the bare boughs above the watercourses; the blackness of the buds is softened into rich brown and yellow; and as this graceful creature thus comes waving into the spring, it is pleasant to remember that the Norse Eddas fabled the first woman to have been named Embla, because she was created from an alder-bough.

The first wild-flower of the year is like land after sea. The two which, throughout the Northern Atlantic States, divide this interest are the *Epigæa repens* (May-flower, ground-laurel, or trailing-arbutus) and the *Hepatica triloba* (liverleaf, liverwort, or blue anemone). Of these two, the latter is perhaps more immediately exciting on first discovery, because it is an annual, not a perennial, and so does not, like the epigæa, exhibit its buds all winter, but opens its blue eyes almost as soon as it emerges from the ground. Without the rich and delicious odor of its compeer, it has an inexpressibly fresh and earthy scent, that seems to bring all the promise of the blessed season with it;

indeed, that clod of fresh turf with the inhalation of which Lord Bacon delighted to begin the day must undoubtedly have been full of the roots of our little hepatica. Its healthy sweetness belongs to the opening year, like Chaucer's poetry; and one thinks that anything more potent and voluptuous would be less enchanting — until one turns to the May-flower. Then comes a richer fascination for the senses. To pick the May-flower is like following in the footsteps of some spendthrift army which has scattered the contents of its treasure-chest among beds of scented moss. The fingers sink in the soft, moist verdure, and make at each instant some superb discovery unawares; again and again, straying carelessly, they clutch some new treasure; and, indeed, the plants are linked together in bright necklaces by secret threads beneath the surface, and where you grasp at one, you hold many. The hands go wandering over the moss as over the keys of a piano, and bring forth odors for melodies. The lovely creatures twine and nestle and lay their glowing faces to the very earth beneath withered leaves, and what seemed mere barrenness becomes fresh and fragrant beauty. So great is the charm of the pursuit, that the epigæa

is really the wild-flower for which our country-people have a hearty passion. Every village child knows its best haunts, and watches for it eagerly in the spring; boys wreathe their hats with it, girls twine it in their hair, and the cottage windows are filled with its beauty.

In collecting these early flowers, one finds or fancies singular natural affinities. I flatter myself with being able always to discover hepatica, if there is any within reach, for I was brought up with it; but other persons, who were brought up with May-flower, and remember searching for it with their childish fingers, can find that better. The most remarkable instance of these natural affinities was in the case of Levi Thaxter and his double anemones. Thaxter had always a gift for wild-flowers, and used often to bring to Cambridge the largest white anemones that were ever seen, from a certain special hill in Watertown; they were not only magnificent in size and whiteness, but had that exquisite blue on the outside of the petals, as if the sky had bent down in ecstasy at last over its darlings, and left visible kisses there. But even this success was not enough, and one day he came with something yet choicer. It

was a rue-leaved anemone (*A. thalictroides*); and each one of the three white flowers was double, not merely with that multiplicity of petals in the disk which is common with this species, but technically and horticulturally double, like the double-flowering almond or cherry, — with the most exquisitely delicate little petals, like fairy lace-work. He had three specimens, and gave one to Professor Asa Gray, of Harvard, who said it was almost or quite unexampled, and another to me. As the man in the fable says of the chameleon, "I have it yet and can produce it."

Now comes the marvel. The next winter Thaxter went to New York for a year, and wrote to me, as spring drew near, with solemn charge to visit his favorite haunt and find another specimen. Armed with this letter of introduction, I sought the spot, and tramped through and through its leafy corridors. Beautiful wood-anemones I found, to be sure, trembling on their fragile stems, deserving all their pretty names, — Wind-flower, Easter-flower, Pasque-Flower, and homœopathic Pulsatilla; — rue-leaved anemones I found also, rising taller and straighter and firmer in stem, with the whorl of leaves a little higher up on the stalk than one fancies

it ought to be, as if there were a supposed danger that the flowers would lose their balance, and as if the leaves must be all ready to catch them. These I found, but the special wonder was not there for me. Then I wrote to him that he must evidently come himself and search; or that, perhaps, as Sir Thomas Browne avers that "smoke doth follow the fairest," so his little treasures had followed him towards New York. Judge of my surprise, when, on opening his next letter, out dropped, from those folds of metropolitan paper, a veritable double anemone. He had just been out to Hoboken, or some such place, to spend an afternoon, and, of course, his pets were there to meet him; and from that day to this I have never heard of such an event as happening to any one else.

May-Day is never allowed to pass in this community without profuse lamentations over the tardiness of our spring as compared with that of England and the poets. Yet it is easy to exaggerate this difference. Even so good an observer as Wilson Flagg is betrayed into saying that the epigæa and hepatica "seldom make their appearance until after the middle of April" in Massachusetts, and that "it is not unusual for the whole month of April to

pass away without producing more than two or three species of wild-flowers." But I have formerly found the hepatica in bloom at Mount Auburn, for three successive years, on the twenty-seventh of March; and it has since been found in Worcester on the seventeenth, and in Danvers on the twelfth. The May-flower is usually as early, though the more gradual expansion of the buds renders it less easy to give dates. And there are nearly twenty species which I have noted, for five or six years together, as found always before May-Day, and therefore properly to be assigned to April. The list includes bloodroot, cowslip, houstonia, saxifrage, dandelion, chickweed, cinquefoil, strawberry, mouse-ear, bellwort, dog's-tooth violet, five species of violet proper, and two of anemone. These are all common flowers, and easily observed; but the catalogue might be increased by rare ones, as the white corydalis, the smaller yellow violet (*V. rotundifolia*), and the claytonia or spring-beauty.

But in England the crocus and the snowdrop — neither being probably an indigenous flower, since neither is mentioned by Chaucer — usually open before the first of March; indeed, the snowdrop was formerly known by

the yet more fanciful name of "Fair Maid of February." Chaucer's daisy comes equally early; and March brings daffodils, narcissi, violets, daisies, jonquils, hyacinths, and marsh-marigolds. This is altogether in advance of our season, so far as the wild-flowers give evidence, — though snowdrops are sometimes found in February even here. But, on the other hand, it would appear that, though a larger number of birds winter in England than in Massachusetts, yet the return of those which migrate is actually earlier among us. From journals which were kept during sixty years in England, and an abstract of which is printed in Hone's "Every-Day Book," it appears that only two birds of passage revisit England before the fifteenth of April, and only thirteen more before the first of May; while with us the song-sparrow, the bluebird, and the red-winged blackbird appear about the first of March, and a good many more by the middle of April. This is a peculiarity of the English spring which I have never seen explained or even mentioned.

After the epigæa and the hepatica have blossomed, there is a slight pause among the wild-flowers, — these two forming a distinct prologue for their annual drama, as the bril-

liant witch-hazel in October brings up its separate epilogue. The truth is, Nature attitudinizes a little, liking to make a neat finish with everything, and then to begin again with *éclat*. Flowers seem spontaneous things enough, but there is evidently a secret marshalling among them, that all may be brought out with due effect. As the country-people say that so long as any snow is left on the ground more snow may be expected, for it must all vanish together at last, — so every seeker of spring-flowers has observed how accurately they seem to move in platoons, with little straggling. Each species seems to burst upon us with a united impulse; you may search for it day after day in vain, but the day when you find one specimen the spell is broken and you find twenty. By the end of April all the margins of the great poem of the woods are illuminated with these exquisite vignettes.

Most of the early flowers either come before the full unfolding of their leaves, or else have inconspicuous ones. Yet Nature always provides for her garlands the due proportion of green. The verdant and graceful sprays of the wild raspberry are unfolded very early, long before its time of flowering. Over the

meadows spread the regular Chinese-pagodas of the equisetum (horsetail or scouring-rush), and the rich, coarse vegetation of the veratrum, or American hellebore. In moist copses the ferns and osmundas begin to uncurl in April, opening their soft coils of spongy verdure, coated with woolly down, from which the humming-bird steals the lining of her nest.

The early blossoms represent the aboriginal epoch of our history: the bloodroot and the May-flower are older than the white man, older perchance than the red man; they alone are the true Native Americans. Of the later wild plants, many of the most common are foreign importations. In our sycophancy we attach grandeur to the name "exotic;" we call aristocratic garden-flowers by that epithet; yet they are no more exotic than the humbler companions they brought with them, which have become naturalized. The dandelion, the buttercup, chickweed, celandine, mullein, burdock, yarrow, whiteweed, nightshade, and most of the thistles, — these are importations. Miles Standish never crushed them with his heavy heel as he strode forth to give battle to the savages; they never kissed the daintier foot of Priscilla, the Puri-

tan maiden. It is noticeable that these are all of rather coarser texture than our indigenous flowers; the children instinctively recognize this, and are apt to omit them when gathering the more delicate native blossoms of the woods.

There is something touching in the gradual retirement before civilization of these fragile aborigines. They do not wait for the actual brute contact of red bricks and curbstones, but they feel the danger miles away. The Indians called the low plantain "the white man's footstep;" and these shy creatures gradually disappear the moment the red man gets beyond hearing. Bigelow's delightful book "Florula Bostoniensis" is becoming a series of epitaphs. Too well we know it, — those of us who in happy Cambridge childhood often gathered, almost within a stone's-throw of Professor Agassiz's new museum, the arethusa and the gentian, the cardinal-flower and the gaudy rhexia, — we who remember the last secret hiding-place of the rhodora in West Cambridge, of the yellow violet and the *Viola debilis* in Watertown, of the *Convallaria trifolia* near Fresh Pond, of the *Hottonia* beyond Wellington's Hill, of the *Cornus florida* in West Roxbury, of the *Clintonia* and the

dwarf ginseng in Brookline, — we who have found in its one chosen nook the sacred *Andromeda polifolia* of Linnæus. Now vanished almost or wholly from city suburbs, these fragile creatures still linger in more rural parts of Massachusetts; but they are doomed everywhere, unconsciously, yet irresistibly; while others still more shy, as the *Linnæa*, the yellow *Cypripedium*, the early pink *Azalea*, and the delicate white *Corydalis* or "Dutchman's breeches," are being chased into the very recesses of the Green and White Mountains. The relics of the Indian tribes are supported by the Legislature at Martha's Vineyard, while these precursors of the Indian are dying unfriended away.

And with these receding plants go also the special insects which haunt them. Who that knew the pure enthusiast, Dr. Thaddeus William Harris, but remembers the accustomed lamentations of the entomologist over the departure of these winged companions of his lifetime? In a letter which I happened to receive from him a short time previous to his death, he thus renewed the lament: "I mourn for the loss of many of the beautiful plants and insects that were once found in this vicinity. *Clethra*, *Rhodora*, *Sanguinaria*, *Viola debilis*,

Viola acuta, Dracæna borealis, Rhexia, Cypripedium, Corallorhiza verna, Orchis spectabilis, with others of less note, have been rooted out by the so-called hand of improvement. *Cicindela rugifrons, Helluo præusta, Sphæroderus stenostomus, Blethisa quadricollis* (*Americana mî*), *Carabus, Horia* (which for several years occurred in profusion on the sands beyond Mount Auburn), with others, have entirely disappeared from their former haunts, driven away, or exterminated perhaps, by the changes effected therein. There may still remain in your vicinity some sequestered spots, congenial to these and other rarities, which may reward the botanist and the entomologist who will search them carefully. Perhaps you may find there the pretty coccinella-shaped, silver-margined *Omophron*, or the still rarer *Panagæus fasciatus*, of which I once took two specimens on Wellington's Hill, but have not seen it since." Is not this, indeed, handling one's specimens "gently as if you loved them," as Isaak Walton bids the angler do with his worm?

There is this merit, at least, among the coarser crew of imported flowers, that they bring their own proper names with them, and we know precisely with whom we have to

deal. In speaking of our own native flowers we must either be careless and inaccurate, or else resort sometimes to the Latin, in spite of the indignation of friends. There is something yet to be said on this point. In England, where the old household and monkish names adhere, they are sufficient for popular and poetic purposes, and the familiar use of scientific names seems an affectation. But here, where many native flowers have no popular names at all, and others are called confessedly by wrong ones, — where it really costs less trouble to use Latin names than English, — the affectation seems the other way. Think of the long list of wild-flowers where the Latin name is spontaneously used by all who speak of the flower: as, Arethusa, Aster, Cistus ("after the fall of the cistus-flower"), Clematis, Clethra, Geranium, Iris, Lobelia, Rhodora, Spiræa, Tiarella, Trientalis, and so on. Even those formed from proper names — the worst possible system of nomenclature — become tolerable at last, and we forget the godfather in the more attractive namesake. When the person concerned happens to be a botanist, there is a peculiar fitness in the association; the Linnæa, at least, would not smell so sweet by any other name.

In other cases the English name is a mere modification of the Latin one, and our ideal associations have really a scientific basis: as with Violet, Lily, Laurel, Gentian, Vervain. Indeed, our enthusiasm for vernacular names is, like that for Indian names of localities, one-sided: we enumerate only the graceful ones, and ignore the rest. It would be a pity to Latinize Touch-me-not, or Yarrow, or Gold Thread, or Self-Heal, or Columbine, or Blue-Eyed Grass, — though, to be sure, this last has an annoying way of shutting up its azure orbs the moment you gather it, and you reach home with a bare, stiff blade, which deserves no better name than *Sisyrinchium anceps*. But in what respect is Cucumber-Root preferable to Medeola, or Solomon's-Seal to Convallaria, or Rock-Tripe to Umbilicaria, or Lousewort to Pedicularis? In other cases the merit is divided: Anemone may dispute the prize of melody with Windflower, Campanula with Harebell, Neottia with Ladies'-Tresses, Uvularia with Bellwort and Strawbell, Potentilla with Cinquefoil, and Sanguinaria with Bloodroot. Hepatica may be bad, but Liverleaf is worse. The pretty name of May-flower is not so popular, after all, as that of Trailing-Arbutus, where the

graceful and appropriate adjective redeems the substantive, which happens to be Latin and incorrect at once. It does seem a waste of time to say *Chrysanthemum leucanthemum* instead of Whiteweed; though, if the long scientific name were an incantation to banish the intruder, our farmers would gladly consent to adopt it.

But a great advantage of a reasonable use of the botanical name is, that it does not deceive us. Our primrose is not the English primrose, any more than it was our robin who tucked up the babes in the wood; our cowslip is not the English cowslip, it is the English marsh-marigold, — Tennyson's marsh-marigold. The pretty name of Azalea means something definite; but its rural name of Honeysuckle confounds under that name flowers without even an external resemblance, — Azalea, Diervilla, Lonicera, Aquilegia, — just as every bird which sings loud in deep woods is popularly denominated a thrush. The really rustic names of both plants and animals are very few with us, — the different species are many; and as we come to know them better and love them more, we absolutely require some way to distinguish them from their half-sisters and second-cousins.

It is hopeless to try to create new popular epithets, or even to revive those which are thoroughly obsolete. Miss Cooper may strive in vain, with benevolent intent, to christen her favorite spring blossoms "May-Wings" and "Gay-Wings," and "Fringe-Cup" and "Squirrel-Cup," and "Cool-Wort" and "Bead-Ruby;" there is no conceivable reason why these should not be the familiar appellations, except the irresistible fact that they are not. It is impossible to create a popular name: one might as well attempt to invent a legend or compose a ballad. *Nascitur, non fit.*

As the spring comes on, and the changing outlines of the elm give daily a new design for a Grecian urn, — its hue first brown with blossoms, then emerald with leaves, — we appreciate the vanishing beauty of the bare boughs. In our favored temperate zone the trees denude themselves each year, like the goddesses before Paris, that we may see which unadorned loveliness is the fairest. Only the unconquerable delicacy of the beech still keeps its soft vestments about it: far into spring, when worn to thin rags and tatters, they cling there still; and when they fall, the new appear as by magic. It must be owned,

however, that the beech has good reasons for this prudishness, and has hereabouts little beauty of figure; while the elms, maples, chestnuts, walnuts, and even oaks, have not exhausted all their store of charms for us, until we have seen them disrobed. Only yonder magnificent pine-tree, — that pitch-pine, nobler when seen in perfection than white-pine, or Norwegian, or Norfolk-Islander, — that pitch-pine, herself a grove, *una nemus*, holds her unchanging beauty throughout the year, like her half-brother, the ocean, whose voice she shares; and only marks the flowing of her annual tide of life by the new verdure that yearly submerges all trace of last year's ebb.

How many lessons of faith and beauty we should lose if there were no winter in our year! Sometimes in following up a water-course among our hills, in the early spring, one comes to a weird and desolate place, where one huge wild grape-vine has wreathed its ragged arms around a whole thicket and brought it to the ground, — swarming to the tops of hemlocks, clenching a dozen young maples at once and tugging them downward, stretching its wizard black length across the underbrush, into the earth and out again,

wrenching up great stones in its blind, aimless struggle. What a piece of chaos is this! Yet come here again, two months hence, and you shall find all this desolation clothed with beauty and with fragrance, one vast bower of soft green leaves and graceful tendrils, while summer birds chirp and flutter amid these sunny arches all the livelong day.

To the end of April, and often later, one still finds remains of snow-banks in sheltered woods, especially among evergreens; and this snow, like that upon high mountains, has often become hardened, by the repeated thawing and freezing of the surface, till it is more impenetrable than ice. But the snow that falls during April is usually what Vermonters call "sugar-snow," — falling in the night and just whitening the surface for an hour or two, and taking its name, not so much from its looks as from the fact that it denotes the proper weather for "sugaring," namely, cold nights and warm days. Our saccharine associations, however, remain so obstinately tropical, that it seems almost impossible for the imagination to locate sugar in New-England trees; though it is known that not the maple only, but the birch and the walnut even, afford it in appreciable quantities.

Along our maritime rivers the people associate April, not with "sugaring," but with "shadding." The pretty *Amelanchier Canadensis* of Gray — the *Aronia* of Whittier's song — is called Shad-bush, or Shad-blow, in Essex County, from its connection with this season; and there is a bird known as the Shad-spirit, which I take to be identical with the flicker or golden-winged woodpecker, whose note is still held to indicate the first day when the fish ascend the river. Upon such slender wings flits our New-England romance!

In April the creative process described by Thales is repeated, and the world is renewed by water. The submerged creatures first feel the touch of spring, and many an equivocal career, beginning in the ponds and brooks, learns later to ignore this obscure beginning, and hops or flutters in the dusty daylight. Early in March, before the first male canker-moth appears on the elm-tree, the whirlwig beetles have begun to play round the broken edges of the ice, and the caddis-worms to crawl beneath it; and soon come the water-skater (*Gerris*) and the water-boatman (*Notonecta*). Turtles and newts are in busy motion when the spring-birds are only just arriving.

Those gelatinous masses in yonder wayside pond are the spawn of water-newts or tritons: in the clear, transparent jelly are imbedded, at regular intervals, little blackish dots; these elongate rapidly, and show symptoms of head and tail curled up in a spherical cell; the jelly is gradually absorbed for their nourishment, until, on some fine morning, each elongated dot gives one vigorous wriggle, and claims thenceforward all the privileges of freedom. The final privilege is often that of being suddenly snapped up by a turtle or a snake: for Nature brings forth her creatures liberally, especially the aquatic ones, sacrifices nine-tenths of them as food for their larger cousins, and reserves only a handful to propagate their race, on the same profuse scale, next season.

It is surprising, in the midst of our Museums and Scientific Schools, how little we yet know of the common things around us. Our *savans* still confess their inability to discriminate with certainty the egg or tadpole of a frog from that of a toad; and it is strange that these hopping creatures, which seem so unlike, should coincide so nearly in their juvenile career, while the tritons and salamanders, which border so closely on each other in

their maturer state as sometimes to be hardly distinguishable, yet choose different methods and different elements for laying their eggs. The eggs of our salamanders, or land-lizards, are deposited beneath the moss on some damp rock, without any gelatinous envelope; they are but few in number, and the anxious mamma may sometimes be found coiled in a circle around them, like the symbolic serpent of eternity.

The small number of birds yet present in early April gives a better opportunity for careful study, — more especially if one goes armed with that best of fowling-pieces, a small spy-glass: the best, — since how valueless for purposes of observation is the bleeding, gasping, dying body, compared with the fresh and living creature, as it tilts, trembles, and warbles on the bough before you! Observe that robin in the oak-tree's top: as he sits and sings, every one of the dozen different notes which he flings down to you is accompanied by a separate flirt and flutter of his whole body, and, as Thoreau says of the squirrel, "each movement seems to imply a spectator." Study that song-sparrow: why is it that he always goes so ragged in spring, and the bluebird so neat? Is it that the song-

sparrow is a wild artist, absorbed in the composition of his lay, and oblivious of ordinary proprieties, while the smooth bluebird and his ash-colored mate cultivate their delicate warble only as a domestic accomplishment, and are always nicely dressed before sitting down at the piano? Then how exciting is the gradual arrival of the birds in their summer plumage! To watch it is like sitting at the window on Easter Sunday to observe the new bonnets. Yonder, in that clump of alders by the brook, is the delicious jargoning of the first flock of yellow-birds; there are the little gentlemen in black and yellow, and the little ladies in olive-brown; "sweet, sweet, sweet," is the only word they say, and often they will so lower their ceaseless warble that, though almost within reach, the minstrels seem far distant. There is the very earliest cat-bird, mimicking the bobolink before the bobolink has come: what is the history of his song, then? Is it a reminiscence of last year, or has the little coquette been practising it all winter, in some gay Southern society, where cat-birds and bobolinks grow intimate, just as Southern fashionables from different States may meet and sing duets at Saratoga? There sounds the sweet, low, long-continued trill of

the little hair-bird, or chipping-sparrow, a suggestion of insect sounds in sultry summer: by and by we shall sometimes hear that same delicate rhythm burst the silence of the June midnights, and then, ceasing, make stillness more still. Now watch that woodpecker, roving in ceaseless search, travelling over fifty trees in an hour, running from top to bottom of some small sycamore, pecking at every crevice, pausing to dot a dozen inexplicable holes in a row upon an apple-tree, but never once intermitting the low, querulous murmur of housekeeping anxiety. Sometimes she stops to hammer with all her little life at some tough piece of bark, strikes harder and harder blows, throws herself back at last, flapping her wings furiously as she brings down her whole strength again upon it; finally it yields, and grub after grub goes down her throat, till she whets her beak after the meal as a wild beast licks its claws, and is off on her pressing business once more.

It is no wonder that there is so little substantial enjoyment of Nature in the community, when we feed children on grammars and dictionaries only, and take no pains to train them to see that which is before their eyes. The mass of the community have "summered

and wintered" the universe pretty regularly, one would think, for a good many years; and yet nine persons out of ten in the town or city, and two out of three even in the country, seriously suppose, for instance, that the buds upon trees are formed in the spring; they have had them within sight all winter, and never seen them. So people think, in good faith, that a plant grows at the base of the stem, instead of at the top: that is, if they see a young sapling in which there is a crotch at five feet from the ground, they expect to see it ten feet from the ground by and by, — confounding the growth of a tree with that of a man or animal. But perhaps the best of us could hardly bear the system of tests unconsciously laid down by a small child of my acquaintance. The boy's father, a college-bred man, had early chosen the better part, and employed his fine faculties in rearing laurels in his own beautiful nursery-gardens, instead of in the more arid soil of court-rooms or state-houses. Of course the young human scion knew the flowers by name before he knew his letters, and used their symbols more readily; and after he got the command of both, he was one day asked by his younger brother what the word "idiot" meant, — for

somebody in the parlor had been saying that somebody else was an idiot. "Don't you know?" quoth Ben, in his sweet voice: "an idiot is a person who does n't know an arbor-vitæ from a pine, — he does n't know anything." When Ben grows up to maturity, bearing such terrible definitions in his unshrinking hands, which of us will be safe?

The softer aspects of Nature, especially, require time and culture before man can enjoy them. To rude races her processes bring only terror, which is very slowly outgrown. Humboldt has best exhibited the scantiness of finer natural perceptions in Greek and Roman literature, in spite of the grand oceanic rhythm of Homer, and the delicate water-coloring of the Greek Anthology and of Horace. The Oriental and the Norse sacred books are full of fresh and beautiful allusions; but the Greek saw in Nature only a framework for Art, and the Roman only a camping-ground for men. Even Virgil describes the grotto of Æneas merely as a "black grove" with "horrid shade," — "*Horrenti atrum nemus imminet umbra.*" Wordsworth points out, that, even in English literature, the "Windsor Forest" of Anne, Countess of Winchelsea, was the first poem which repre-

sented Nature as a thing to be consciously enjoyed; and as she was almost the first English poetess, we might be tempted to think that we owe this appreciation, like some other good things, to the participation of woman in literature. But, on the other hand, it must be remembered that the voluminous Duchess of Newcastle, in her "Ode on Melancholy," describes among the symbols of hopeless gloom "the still moonshine night" and "a mill where rushing waters run about," — the sweetest natural images. In our own country, the early explorers seemed to find only horror in its woods and waterfalls. Josselyn, in 1672, could only describe the summer splendor of the White Mountain region as "dauntingly terrible, being full of rocky hills, as thick as molehills in a meadow, and full of infinite thick woods." Father Hennepin spoke of Niagara, in the narrative still quoted in the guide-books, as a "frightful cataract;" and honest John Adams could find no better name than "horrid chasm" for the picturesque gulf at Egg Rock, where he first saw the sea-anemone.

But we are lingering too long, perhaps, with this sweet April of smiles and tears. It needs only to add, that all her traditions are

beautiful. Ovid says well, that she was not named from *aperire*, to open, as some have thought, but from *Aphrodite*, goddess of beauty. April holds Easter-time, St. George's Day, and the Eve of St. Mark's. She has not, like her sister May in Germany, been transformed to a verb and made a synonyme for joy, — "*Deine Seele maiet den trüben Herbst*," — but April was believed in early ages to have been the birth-time of the world. According to the Venerable Bede, the point was first accurately determined at a council held at Jerusalem about A. D. 200, when, after much profound discussion, it was finally decided that the world's birthday occurred on Sunday, April 8th, — that is, at the vernal equinox and the full moon. But April is certainly the birth-time of the season, at least, if not of the planet. Its festivals are older than Christianity, older than the memory of man. No sad associations cling to it, as to the month of June, in which month, says William of Malmesbury, kings are wont to go to war, — "*Quando solent reges ad arma procedere*," — but it contains the Holy Week, and it is the Holy Month. And in April Shakespeare was born, and in April he died.

III

WATER-LILIES

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WATER-LILIES

THE inconstant April mornings drop showers or sunbeams over the glistening lake, while far beneath its surface a murky mass disengages itself from the muddy bottom, and rises slowly through the waves. The tasselled alder-branches droop above it; the last year's blackbird's nest swings over it in the grape-vine; the newly opened Hepaticas and Epigæas on the neighboring bank peer down modestly to look for it; the water-skater (Gerris) pauses on the surface near it, casting on the shallow bottom the odd shadow of his feet, like three pairs of boxing-gloves; the Notonecta, or water-boatman, rows round and round it, sometimes on his breast, sometimes on his back; queer caddis-worms trail their self-made homesteads of leaves or twigs beside it; the Dytiscus, dor-bug of the water, blunders clumsily against it; the tadpole wriggles his stupid way to it, and rests upon it, meditating of future frogdom; the passing

wild-duck dives and nibbles at it; the mink and muskrat brush it with their soft fur; the spotted turtle slides over it; the slow larvæ of gauzy dragon-flies cling sleepily to its sides and await their change: all these fair or uncouth creatures feel, through the dim waves, the blessed longing of spring; and yet not one of them dreams that within that murky mass there lies a treasure too white and beautiful to be yet intrusted to the waves, and that for many a day the bud must yearn toward the surface, before, aspiring above it, as mortals to heaven, it meets the sunshine with the answering beauty of the Water-Lily.

Days and weeks have passed away; the wild-duck has flown onward, to dive for his luncheon in some remoter lake; the tadpoles have made themselves legs, with which they have vanished; the caddis-worms have sealed themselves up in their cylinders, and emerged again as winged insects; the dragon-flies have crawled up the water-reeds, and, clinging with heads upturned, have undergone the change which symbolizes immortality; the world is transformed from spring to summer; the lily-buds are opened into glossy leaf and radiant flower, and we have come for the harvest.

We visitors lodged, last night, in the old English phrase, "at the sign of the Oak and Star." Wishing not, indeed, like the ancient magicians, to gather magic berry and bud before sunrise, but at least to see these treasures of the lake in their morning hour, we camped overnight on a little island, which one tall tree almost covers with its branches, while a dense undergrowth of young chestnuts and birches fills all the intervening space, touching the water all around the circular, shelving shore. The day had been hot, but the night was cool, and we kindled a gypsy fire of twigs, less for warmth than for society. The first gleam made the dark, lonely islet into a cheering home, turned the protecting tree to a starlit roof, and the chestnut-sprays to illuminated walls. To us, lying beneath their shelter, every fresh flickering of the fire kindled the leaves into brightness and banished into dark interstices the lake and sky; then the fire died into embers, the leaves faded into solid darkness in their turn, and water and heavens showed light and close and near, until fresh twigs caught fire and the blaze came up again. Rising to look forth at intervals, during the peaceful hours, — for it is the worst feature of a night out-doors, that sleep-

ing seems such a waste of time, — we watched the hilly and wooded shores of the lake sink into gloom and glimmer into dawn again, amid the low plash of waters and the noises of the night.

Precisely at half-past three, a song-sparrow above our heads gave one liquid trill, so inexpressibly sudden and delicious, that it seemed to set to music every atom of freshness and fragrance that Nature held; then the spell was broken, and the whole shore and lake were vocal with song. Joining in this jubilee of morning, we were early in motion; bathing and breakfast, though they seemed indisputably in accordance with the instincts of the Universe, yet did not detain us long, and we were promptly on our way to Lily Pond. Will the reader join us?

It is one of those summer days when a veil of mist gradually burns away before the intense sunshine, and the sultry morning only plays at coolness, and that with its earliest visitors alone. But we are before the sunlight, though not before the sunrise, and can watch the pretty game of alternating mist and shine. Stray gleams of glory lend their trailing magnificence to the tops of chestnut-trees, floating vapors raise the outlines of the hills and make

mystery of the wooded islands, and, as we glide through the placid water, we can sing, with the Chorus in the "Ion" of Euripides, "O immense and brilliant air, resound with our cries of joy!"

Almost every town has its Lily Pond, dear to boys and maidens, and partially equalizing, by its annual delights, the presence or absence of other geographical advantages. Ours is accessible from the larger lake only by taking the skiff over a narrow embankment, which protects our fairy-land by its presence, and eight distant factories by its dam. Once beyond it, we are in a realm of dark Lethean water, utterly unlike the sunny depths of the main lake. Hither the water-lilies have retreated, to a domain of their own. In the bosom of these shallow waves, there stand hundreds of submerged and dismasted roots, still upright, spreading their vast, uncouth limbs like enormous spiders beneath the surface. They are remnants of border wars with the axe, vegetable Witheringtons, still fighting on their stumps, but gradually sinking into the soft ooze, and ready, perhaps, when a score of centuries has piled two more strata of similar remains in mud above them, to furnish foundations for a newer New Orleans;

that city having been lately discovered to be thus supported.

The present decline in the manufacturing business is clear revenue to the water-lilies, and these ponds are higher than usual, because the idle mills do not draw them off. But we may notice, in observing the shores, that peculiar charm of water, that, whether its quantity be greater or less, its grace is the same; it makes its own boundary in lake or river, and where its edge is, there seems the natural and permanent margin. And the same natural fitness, without reference to mere quantity, extends to its flowery children. Before us lie islands and continents of lilies, acres of charms, whole, vast, unbroken surfaces of stainless whiteness. And yet, as we approach them, every island cup that floats in lonely dignity, apart from the multitude, appears perfect in itself, couched in white expanded perfection, its reflection taking a faint glory of pink that is scarcely perceptible in the flower. As we glide gently among them, the air grows fragrant, and a stray breeze flaps the leaves, as if to welcome us. Each floating flower becomes suddenly a ship at anchor, or rather seems beating up against the summer wind in a regatta of blossoms.

Early as it is in the day, the greater part of the flowers are already expanded. Indeed, that experience of Thoreau's, of watching them open in the first sunbeams, rank by rank, is not easily obtained, unless perhaps in a narrow stream, where the beautiful slumberers are more regularly marshalled. In our lake, at least, they open irregularly, though rapidly. But, this morning, many linger as buds, while others peer up, in half-expanded beauty, beneath the lifted leaves, frolicsome as Pucks or baby-nymphs. As you raise the leaf, in such cases, it is impossible not to imagine that a pair of tiny hands have upheld it, and that the pretty head will dip down again, and disappear. Others, again, have expanded all but the inmost pair of white petals, and these spring apart at the first touch of the finger on the stem. Some spread vast vases of fragrance, six or seven inches in diameter, while others are small and delicate, with petals like fine lace-work. Smaller still, we sometimes pass a flotilla of infant leaves, an inch in diameter. All these grow from the dark water, — and the blacker it is, the fairer their whiteness shows. But your eye follows the stem often vainly into those sombre depths, and vainly seeks to be-

hold Sabrina fair, sitting with her twisted braids of lilies, beneath the glassy, cool, but not translucent wave. Do not start, when, in such an effort, only your own dreamy face looks back upon you, beyond the gunwale of the reflected boat, and you find that you float double — self and shadow.

Let us rest our paddles, and look round us, while the idle motion sways our light skiff onward, now half embayed among the lily-pads, now lazily gliding over intervening gulfs. There is a great deal going on in these waters and their fringing woods and meadows. All the summer long the pond is bordered with successive walls of flowers. In early spring emerge the yellow catkins of the swamp-willow, first; then the long tassels of the graceful alders expand and droop, till they weep their yellow dust upon the water; then come the birch-blossoms, more tardily; then the downy leaves and white clusters of the medlar or shad-bush (*Amelanchier Canadensis*); these dropping, the roseate chalices of the mountain-laurel open; as they fade into melancholy brown, the sweet Azalea uncloses; and before its last honeyed blossom has trailed down, dying, from the stem, the more fragrant Clethra starts out above, the

button-bush thrusts forth its merry face amid wild roses, and the Clematis waves its sprays of beauty. Mingled with these grow, lower, the spiræas, white and pink, yellow touch-me-not, fresh white arrowhead, bright blue vervain and skull-cap, dull snake-head, gay monkey-flower, coarse eupatoriums, milk-weeds, golden-rods, asters, thistles, and a host beside. Beneath, the brilliant scarlet cardinal-flower begins to palisade the moist shores; and after its superb reflection has passed away from the waters, the grotesque witch-hazel flares out its narrow yellow petals amidst the October leaves, and so ends the floral year. There is not a week during all these months when one cannot stand in the boat and wreathe garlands of blossoms from the shores.

These all crowd around the brink, and watch, day and night, the opening and closing of the water-lilies. Meanwhile, upon the waters, our queen keeps her chosen court, nor can one of these mere land-loving blossoms touch the hem of her garment. In truth, she bears no sister near her throne. There is but this one species among us, *Nymphæa odorata*, the beautiful little rose-colored *Nymphæa sanguinea*, which still adorns

the Botanic Gardens, being merely an occasional variety. She has, indeed, an English half-sister, *Nymphæa alba*, less beautiful, less fragrant, but keeping more fashionable hours, — not opening (according to Linnæus) till seven, nor closing till four. And she has a humble cousin, the yellow Nuphar, who keeps commonly aloof, as becomes a poor relation, though created from the self-same mud, — a fact which Hawthorne has beautifully moralized. The prouder Nelumbium, a second-cousin, lineal descendant of the sacred bean of Pythagoras, has fallen to an obscurer position, but dwells, like a sturdy democrat, in the Far West.

Yet, undisturbed, the water-lily reigns on, with her retinue around her. The tall pickerel-weed (Pontederia) is her gentleman-usher, gorgeous in blue and gold through July, somewhat rusty in August. The water-shield (Hydropeltis) is chief maid-of-honor; a high-born lady she, not without royal blood, indeed, but with rather a bend sinister; not precisely beautiful, but very fastidious; encased over her whole person with a gelatinous covering, literally a starched duenna. Sometimes she is suspected of conspiring to drive her mistress from the throne; for we have

observed certain slow watercourses where the leaves of the water-lily have been almost wholly replaced, in a series of years, by the similar, but smaller, leaves of the water-shield. More rarely seen is the slender Utricularia, a dainty maiden, whose light feet scarce touch the water, — with the still more delicate floating white Water-Ranunculus, and the shy Villarsia, whose submerged flowers merely peep one day above the surface and then close again forever. Then there are many humbler attendants, Potamogetons or pond-weeds. And here float little emissaries from the dominions of land; for the fallen florets of the Viburnum drift among the lily-pads, with mast-like stamens erect, sprinkling the water with a strange beauty, and cheating us with the promise of a new aquatic flower.

These are the still life of this sequestered nook; but it is in fact a crowded thoroughfare. No tropic jungle more swarms with busy existence than these midsummer waters and their bushy banks. The warm and humming air is filled with insect sounds, ranging from the murmur of invisible gnats and midges to the impetuous whirring of the great Libellulæ, large almost as swallows,

and hawking high in air for their food. Swift butterflies glance by, moths flutter, flies buzz, grasshoppers and katydids pipe their shrill notes, sharp as the edges of the sunbeams. Busy bees go humming past, straight as arrows, express-freight-trains from one blossoming copse to another. Showy wasps of many species fume uselessly about, in gallant uniforms, wasting an immense deal of unnecessary anger on the sultry universe. Graceful, stingless Sphexes and Ichneumon-flies emulate their bustle, without their weapons. Delicate lady-birds come and go to the milkweeds, spotted almost as regularly as if Nature had decided to number the species, like policemen or hack-drivers, from one to twenty. Elegant little Lepturæ fly with them, so gay and airy they hardly seem like beetles. Phryganeæ (once caddis-worms), lace-flies, and long-tailed Ephemeræ flutter more heavily by. On the large alder-flowers clings the superb *Desmocerus palliatus*, beautiful as a tropical insect, with his steel-blue armor and his golden cloak (*pallium*) above his shoulders, grandest knight on this Field of the Cloth of Gold. The countless fireflies which spangled the evening mist now only crawl sleepily, daylight creatures, with the lustre

buried in their milky bodies. More wholly children of night, the soft, luxurious Sphinxes (or hawk-moths) come not here; fine ladies of the insect world, their home is among gardens and greenhouses, late and languid by day, but all night long upon the wing, dancing in the air with unwearied muscles till long past midnight, and supping on honey at last. They come not; but the nobler butterflies soar above us, stoop a moment to the water, and then with a few lazy wavings of their sumptuous wings float far over the oak-trees to the woods they love.

All these hover near the water-lily; but its special parasites are an enamelled beetle (*Donacia metallica*) which keeps house permanently in the flower, and a few smaller ones which tenant the surface of the leaves, — larva, pupa, and perfect insect, forty feeding like one, and each leading its whole earthly career on this floating island of perishable verdure. The "beautiful blue damsel-flies" alight also in multitudes among them, so fearless that they perch with equal readiness on our boat or paddle, and so various that two adjacent ponds will sometimes be haunted by two distinct sets of species. In the water, among the leaves, little shining whirlwigs

wheel round and round, fifty joining in the dance, till, at the slightest alarm, they whirl away to some safer ball-room, and renew the merriment. On every floating log, as we approach it, there is a convention of turtles, sitting in calm debate, like mailed barons, till, as we draw near, they plump into the water, and paddle away for some subaqueous Runnymede. Beneath, the shy and stately pickerel vanishes at a glance, shoals of minnows glide, black and bearded pouts frisk aimlessly, soft water-newts hang poised without motion, and slender pickerel-frogs cease occasionally their submerged croaking, and, darting to the surface, with swift vertical strokes, gulp a mouthful of fresh air, and down again to renew the moist soliloquy.

Time would fail us to tell of the feathered life around us, — the blackbirds that build securely in these thickets, the stray swallows that dip their wings in the quiet waters, and the kingfishers that still bring, as the ancients fabled, halcyon days. Yonder stands, against the shore, a bittern, motionless in that wreath of mist which makes his long-legged person almost as dim as his far-off booming by night. There poises a hawk, before sweeping down to some chosen bough in the dense

forest; and there flies a pair of blue-jays, screaming, from tree to tree. As for wild quadrupeds, the race is almost passed away. Far to the north, indeed, the great moose still browses on the lily-pads, and the shy beaver nibbles them; but here the few lingering four-footed creatures only haunt, but do not graze upon, these floating pastures. Eyes more favored than ours may yet chance to spy an otter in this still place; there by the shore are the small footprints of a mink; that dark thing disappearing in the waters yonder, a soft mass of drowned fur, is a muskrat, or "musquash." Later in the season, a mound of earth will be his winter dwelling-place; and these myriad muscle-shells at the water's edge are the remnant of his banquets, — once banquets for the Indians, too.

But we must return to our lilies. There is no sense of wealth like floating in this archipelago of white and green. The emotions of avarice become almost demoralizing. Every flower bears a fragrant California in its bosom, and you feel impoverished at the thought of leaving one behind. Then, after the first half-hour of eager grasping, one becomes fastidious, rather avoids those on which the

wasps and flies have alighted, and seeks only the stainless. But handle them tenderly, as if you loved them. Do not grasp at the open flower as if it were a peony or a hollyhock, for then it will come off, stalkless, in your hand, and you will cast it blighted upon the water; but coil your thumb and second finger affectionately around it, press the extended forefinger firmly to the stem below, and, with one steady pull, you will secure a long and delicate stalk, fit to twine around the graceful head of your beloved, as the Hindoo goddess of beauty encircled with a Lotus the brow of Rama.

Consider the lilies. All over our rural watercourses, at midsummer, float these cups of snow. They are Nature's symbols of coolness. They suggest to us the white garments of their Oriental worshippers. They come with the white roses, and prepare the way for the white lilies of the garden. The white doe of Rylstone and Andrew Marvell's fawn might fitly bathe amid their beauties. Yonder steep bank slopes down to the lake-side, one solid mass of pale pink laurel, but, once upon the water, a purer tint prevails. The pink fades into a lingering flush, and the white creature floats peerless, set in green without and gold

within. That bright circle of stamens is the very ring with which Doges once wedded the Adriatic; Venice has lost it, but it dropped into the water-lily's bosom, and there it rests forever. So perfect in form, so redundant in beauty, so delicate, so spotless, so fragrant, — what presumptuous lover ever dared, in his most enamoured hour, to liken his mistress to a water-lily? No human Blanche or Lilian was ever so fair as that.

The water-lily comes of an ancient and sacred family of white-robed priests. They assisted at the most momentous religious ceremonies, from the beginning of recorded time. The Egyptian Lotus was a sacred plant; it was dedicated to Harpocrates and to the god Nofr Atmoo, — *Nofr* meaning *good*, whence the name of our yellow lily, Nuphar. But the true Egyptian flower was *Nymphæa Lotus*, though *Nymphæa cærulea*, Moore's "blue water-lilies," can be traced on the sculptures also. It was cultivated in tanks in the gardens; it was the chief material for festal wreaths; a single bud hung over the forehead of many a queenly dame; and the sculptures represent the weary flowers as dropping from the heated hands of belles, in the later hours of the feast. Rock softly on

the waters, fair lilies! your Eastern kindred have rocked on the stormier bosom of Cleopatra. The Egyptian Lotus was, moreover, the emblem of the sacred Nile, — as the Hindoo species, of the sacred Ganges; and each was held the symbol of the creation of the world from the waters. The sacred bull Apis was wreathed with its garlands; there were niches for water, to place it among tombs; it was carved in the capitals of columns; it was represented on plates and vases; the sculptures show it in many sacred uses, even as a burnt-offering; Isis holds it; and the god Nilus still binds a wreath of water-lilies around the throne of Memnon.

From Egypt the Lotus was carried to Assyria, and Layard found it among fir-cones and honeysuckles on the later sculptures of Nineveh. The Greeks dedicated it to the nymphs, whence the name *Nymphæa*. Nor did the Romans disregard it, though the Lotus to which Ovid's nymph Lotis was changed, *servato nomine*, was a tree, and not a flower. Still different a thing was the enchanted stem of the Lotus-eaters of Herodotus, which prosaic botanists have reduced to the *Zizyphus Lotus* found by Mungo Park, translating also the yellow Lotus-dust into

a mere "farina, tasting like sweet gingerbread."

But in the Lotus of Hindostan we find our flower again, and the Oriental sacred books are cool with water-lilies. Open the Vishnù Purana at any page, and it is a *Sortes Lilianæ*. The orb of the earth is Lotus-shaped, and is upborne by the tusks of Vesava, as if he had been sporting in a lake where the leaves and blossoms float. Brahma, first incarnation of Vishnu, creator of the world, was born from a Lotus; so was Sri or Lakshmu, the Hindoo Venus, goddess of beauty and prosperity, protectress of womanhood, whose worship guards the house from all danger. "Seated on a full-blown Lotus, and holding a Lotus in her hand, the goddess Sri, radiant with beauty, rose from the waves." The Lotus is the chief ornament of the subterranean Eden, Patala, and the holy mountain Meru is thought to be shaped like its seed-vessel, larger at summit than at base. When the heavenly Urvasi fled from her earthly spouse, Purúvavas, he found her sporting with four nymphs of heaven, in a lake beautified with the Lotus. When the virtuous Prahlada was burned at the stake, he cried to his cruel father, "The fire burneth me not, and all

around I behold the face of the sky, cool and fragrant with beds of Lotus-flowers!" Above all, the graceful history of the transformations of Krishna is everywhere hung with these fresh chaplets. Every successive maiden whom the deity wooes is Lotus-eyed, Lotus-mouthed, or Lotus-cheeked, and the youthful hero wears always a Lotus-wreath. Also "the clear sky was bright with the autumnal moon, and the air fragrant with the perfume of the wild water-lily, in whose buds the clustering bees were murmuring their song."

Elsewhere we find fuller details. "In the primordial state of the world, the rudimentary universe, submerged in water, reposed on the bosom of the Eternal. Brahma, the architect of the world, poised on a Lotus-leaf, floated upon the waters, and all that he was able to discern with his eight eyes was water and darkness. Amid scenes so ungenial and dismal, the god sank into a profound reverie, when he thus soliloquized: 'Who am I? Whence am I?' In this state of abstraction Brahma continued during the period of a century and a half of the gods, without apparent benefit or a solution of his inquiries, — a circumstance which caused him great uneasiness of mind." It is a comfort, however,

to know that subsequently a voice came to him, on which he rose, "seated himself upon the Lotus in an attitude of contemplation, and reflected upon the Eternal, who soon appeared to him in the form of a man with a thousand heads," — a questionable exchange for his Lotus-solitude.

This is Brahminism; but the other great form of Oriental religion has carried the same fair symbol with it. One of the Bibles of the Buddhists is named "The White Lotus of the Good Law." A pious Nepaulese bowed in reverence before a vase of lilies which perfumed the study of Sir William Jones. At sunset in Thibet, the French missionaries tell us, every inhabitant of every village prostrates himself in the public square, and the holy invocation, "Oh, the gem in the Lotus!" goes murmuring over hill and valley, like the sound of many bees. It is no unmeaning phrase, but an utterance of ardent desire to be absorbed into that Brahma whose emblem is the sacred flower. This mystic formula or "mani" is imprinted on the pavement of the streets, it floats on flags from the temples, and the wealthy Buddhists maintain sculptor-missionaries, Old Mortalities of the water-lily, who, wandering to distant lands,

carve the blessed words upon cliff and stone.

Having got thus far into Orientalism, we can hardly expect to get out again without some slight entanglement in philology. Lily-pads. Whence *pads?* No other leaf is identified with that singular monosyllable. Has our floating Lotus-leaf any connection with padding, or with a footpad? with the ambling pad of an abbot, or a paddle, or a paddock, or a padlock? with many-domed Padua proud, or with St. Patrick? Is the name derived from the Anglo-Saxon *paad* or *pethian*, or the Greek πατέω? The etymologists are silent; but was there ever a philological trouble for which the Sanscrit could not afford at least a conjectural cure? A dictionary of that venerable tongue is an ostrich's stomach, which can crack the hardest etymological nut. The Sanscrit name for the Lotus is simply *Padma.* The learned Brahmins call the Egyptian deities Padma Devi, or Lotus-Gods; the second of the eighteen Hindoo Puranas is styled the Padma Purana, because it treats of the "epoch when the world was a golden Lotus;" and the sacred incantation which goes murmuring through Thibet is "Om mani padme houm."

It would be singular, if upon these delicate floating leaves a fragment of our earliest vernacular has been borne down to us, so that here the school-boy is more learned than the philologists.

This lets us down easily to the more familiar uses of this plant divine. By the Nile, in early days, the water-lily was good not merely for devotion, but for diet. "From the seeds of the Lotus," said Pliny, "the Egyptians make bread." The Hindoos still eat the seeds, roasted in sand; also the stalks and roots. In South America, from the seeds of the Victoria (*Nymphæa Victoria*, now *Victoria Regia*) a farina is made, preferred to that of the finest wheat, — Bonpland even suggesting to our reluctant imagination Victoria-pies. But the European species are used, so far as is reported, only in dyeing, and as food (if the truth be told) of swine. Our own water-lily is rather more powerful in its uses; the root contains tannin and gallic acid, and a decoction of it "gives a black precipitate, with sulphate of iron." It graciously consents to become an astringent and a styptic, and a poultice, and, banished from all other temples, still lingers in those of Æsculapius.

The botanist also finds his special satisfac-

tions in the flower. It has some strange peculiarities of structure. So loose is the internal distribution of its tissues, that it was for some time held doubtful to which of the two great vegetable divisions, exogenous or endogenous, it belonged. Its petals, moreover, furnish the best example of the gradual transition of petals into stamens, — illustrating that wonderful law of identity which is the great discovery of modern science. Every child knows this peculiarity of the water-lily, but the extent of it seems to vary with season and locality, and sometimes one finds a succession of flowers almost entirely free from this confusion of organs.

The reader may not care to learn that the order of Nymphæaceæ "differs from Ranunculaceæ in the consolidation of its carpels, from Papaveraceæ in the placentation not being parietal, and from Nelumbiaceæ in the want of a large truncated disc containing monospermous achenia;" but they may like to know that the water-lily has relations on land, in all gradations of society, from poppy to magnolia, and yet does not conform its habits precisely to those of any of them. Its great black roots, sometimes as large as a man's arm, form a network at the bottom of

the water. Its stem floats, an airy four-celled tube, adapting itself to the depth, and stiff in shallows, like the stalk of the yellow lily; and it contracts and curves downward when seed-time approaches. The leaves show beneath the magnifier beautiful adaptations of structure. They are not, like those of land-plants, constructed with deep veins to receive the rain and conduct it to the stem, but are smooth and glossy, and of even surface. The leaves of land-vegetation have also thousands of little breathing-pores, principally on the under side: the apple-leaf, for instance, has twenty-four thousand to the square inch. But here they are fewer; they are wholly on the upper side, and, whereas in other cases they open or shut according to the moisture of the atmosphere, here the greedy leaves, secure of moisture, scarcely deign to close them. Nevertheless, even these give some recognition of hygrometric necessities, and, though living on the water, and not merely christened with dewdrops like other leaves, but baptized by immersion all the time, they are yet known to suffer in drought and to take pleasure in the rain.

After speaking of the various kindred of the water-lily, it would be wrong to leave our

modest species without due mention of its rarest and most magnificent relative, at first claimed even as its twin sister, and classed as a Nymphæa. I once lived near neighbor to a Victoria Regia. Nothing in the world of vegetable existence has such a human interest. The charm is not in the mere size of the plant, which disappoints everybody, as Niagara does, when tried by that sole standard. The leaves of the Victoria, indeed, attain a diameter of six feet; the largest flowers, of twenty-three inches, — four times the size of the largest of our water-lilies. But it is not the measurements of the Victoria, it is its life which fascinates. It is not a thing merely of dimensions, nor merely of beauty, but a creature of vitality and motion. Those vast leaves expand and change almost visibly. They have been known to grow half an inch an hour, eight inches a day. Rising one day from the water, a mere clenched mass of yellow prickles, a leaf is transformed the next day to a crimson salver, gorgeously tinted on its upturned rim. Then it spreads into a raft of green, armed with long thorns, and supported by a framework of ribs and crosspieces, an inch thick, and so substantial that the Brazil Indians, while gathering the seed-

vessels, place their young children on the leaves; — *yrupe*, or water-platter, they call the accommodating plant. But even these expanding leaves are not the glory of the Victoria; the glory is in the opening of the flower.

I have sometimes looked in, for a passing moment, at the greenhouse, its dwelling-place, during the period of flowering, — and then stayed for more than an hour, unable to leave the fascinating scene. After the strange flower-bud has reared its dark head from the placid tank, moving it a little, uneasily, like some imprisoned water-creature, it pauses for a moment in a sort of dumb despair. Then, trembling again, and collecting all its powers, it thrusts open, with an indignant jerk, the rough calyx-leaves; and the beautiful disrobing begins. The firm, white, central cone, once so closely infolded, quivers a little, and swiftly, before your eyes, the first of the hundred petals detaches its delicate edges, and springs back, opening towards the water, while its white reflection opens to meet it from below. Many moments of repose follow, — you watch, — another petal trembles, detaches, springs open, and is still. Then another, and another, and another. Each

movement is so quiet, yet so emphatic, so living, so human, that the radiant creature seems a Musidora of the water, and you almost blush with a sense of guilt, in gazing on that peerless privacy. As petal by petal slowly opens, there still stands the central cone of snow, a glacier, an alp, a Jungfrau, while each avalanche of whiteness seems the last. Meanwhile a strange, rich odor fills the air, and Nature seems to concentrate all fascinations and claim all senses for this jubilee of her darling.

So pass the enchanted moments of the evening, till the fair thing pauses at last, and remains for hours unchanged. In the morning, one by one, those white petals close again, shutting all their beauty in, and you watch through the short sleep for the period of waking. Can this bright, transfigured creature appear again in the same chaste loveliness? Your fancy can scarcely trust it, fearing some disastrous change; and your fancy is too true a prophet. Come again, after the second day's opening, and you start at the transformation which one hour has secretly produced. Can this be the virgin Victoria, — this thing of crimson passion, this pile of pink and yellow, relaxed, expanding,

voluptuous, lolling languidly upon the water, never to rise again? In this short time every tint of every petal is transformed; it is gorgeous in beauty, but it is "Hebe turned to Magdalen."

Such is the Victoria Regia. But our rustic water-lily, our innocent Nymphæa, never claiming such a hot-house glory, never drooping into such a blush, blooms on placidly in the quiet waters, till she modestly folds her leaves for the last time, and bows her head beneath the surface forever. Next year she lives for us only in her children, fair and pure as herself.

Nay, not alone in them, but also in memory. The fair vision will not fade from us, though the paddle has dipped its last crystal drop from the waves, and the boat is drawn upon the shore. We may yet visit many lovely and lonely places, — meadows thick with violet, or the homes of the shy Rhodora, or those sloping forest-haunts where the slight Linnæa hangs its twin-born heads,— but no scene will linger on our vision like this annual Feast of the Lilies. On scorching mountains, amid raw prairie-winds, or upon the regal ocean, the white pageant shall come back to memory again, with all the luxury of summer

heats, and all the fragrant coolness that can relieve them. We shall fancy ourselves again among these fleets of anchored lilies, — again, like Urvasi, sporting amid the Lake of Lotuses.

For that which is remembered is often more vivid than that which is seen. The eye paints better in the presence, the heart in the absence, of the object most dear. "He who longs after beautiful Nature can best describe her," said Bettine Brentano; "he who is in the midst of her loveliness can only lie down and enjoy." It enhances the truth of the poet's verses, that he writes them in his study. Absence is the very air of passion, and all the best description is *in memoriam*. As with our human beloved, when the graceful presence is with us, we cannot analyze or describe, but merely possess, and only after its departure can it be portrayed by our yearning desires; so is it with Nature: only in losing her do we gain the power to describe her, and we are introduced to Art, as we are to Eternity, by the dropping away of our companions.

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